

# MISSOURI STATE PARKS

## Mark Twain State Park SALT RIVER HILLS SERENITY

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**M**ark Twain State Park was established in the 1920s through the efforts of the Mark Twain Memorial Park Association. It was created in honor of the famous Missouri author and humorist Samuel L. Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, who was born in the nearby village of Florida, Mo. The association raised over \$10,000 to purchase 100 acres of land overlooking the Salt River. Twain's sole surviving daughter, Mrs. Clara Clemens Gabrilowitsch, gave singing concerts to benefit the memorial effort. With additional land purchased by the state, Mark Twain State Park was established in 1924. It is the third oldest state park in Missouri and the first established north of the Missouri River.

The character and role of the park changed dramatically when Clarence Cannon Dam was built across the Salt River, creating Mark Twain Lake. Construction of the dam began in 1966 and was completed in 1983. In addition to the power generation, the 18,000-acre lake provides flood control for the Salt River valley as well as recreational opportunities. The park land that once overlooked the fertile Salt River now overlooks the lake.

The park is located in the Salt River Hills of northeast Missouri. Receiving its name from the numerous salt springs or licks in the area, the Salt River carved its way into

the land, exposing towering limestone bluffs. The river and its tributaries created a landscape that is more hilly and rugged than the surrounding level terrain.

The topography of the area and some of its flora are similar to the Ozark region found much further south. A diverse set of plant species in the park range from prairie types, such as orange puccoon, lead plant and purple prairie clover, to upland forest species, including black oak, blackjack oak and blue ash.

Mark Twain State Park serves as a refuge for white-tailed deer, turkey, raccoons, squirrels, osprey, northern harriers and numerous waterfowl. Bald eagles often spend the winter here, and have even nested near the park in recent years.

For visitors wishing to spend a night or more in the park, there are 40 basic and 63 electric sites, some available for advance reservation. Located on the lake, the campground is equipped with modern showers and laundry facilities. A courtesy boat ramp and fish-cleaning station are located in the campground area for campers. Spending a relaxing night under the stars is the perfect way to cap off a day of fishing, boating, swimming, picnicking and hiking.

Two public boat ramps with paved park-





ing lots are located in the park for the convenience of visitors with boats. Fishing enthusiasts can cast their lines in Mark Twain Lake, searching for blue gill, crappie, catfish, largemouth bass, carp, walleye and perch. The lake has many quiet coves where anglers can spend peaceful days fishing. For park visitors seeking sun and fun, a public beach offers a safe swimming area along with a change house.

Buzzard's Roost picnic area provides a shaded setting for a relaxing lunch or family fun. Two reservable shelter houses and a playground are available for park visitors. For the hiker wanting to see more of the park, six miles of trail meander between Buzzard's Roost and the campground. Hiking here affords numerous opportunities to view woodland wildlife and plant life, as well as scenic views of Mark Twain Lake. The Buzzard's Roost overlook provides a popular view of the lake from a towering limestone bluff.

Also located in the park is Camp Colborn, a group camp that features a dining lodge, kitchen, sleeping cabins and outdoor play court. Camp Colborn is available by reservation only.

Amid the vast array of recreational options, Mark Twain State Park has maintained a peaceful, serene setting. Be sure to stop and see the Mark Twain Birthplace State Historic Site located adjacent to the park. Samuel Clemens' home is



DNR photo by Gary Barkhaus.

### *Buzzard's Roost*

preserved in the museum, and the site interprets the life and times of this American legend.

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